

# Crops Planted in Spring and Early Summer Attract Doves in the Fall

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**M**ourning dove hunting is a popular sport in Alabama. In fact, more hunters take part in dove seasons than in any of the other Alabama game bird seasons. Since doves are speedy aerial acrobats, considerable skill is needed to bag them consistently. Doves feed almost entirely on seeds of various types, either cultivated or grown naturally. Doves can be hunted near spots they go to for water and around openings of various kinds. However, most dove hunting occurs on fields managed for an ample supply of seeds under conditions the birds prefer.

## Plan Ahead


Some areas that attract doves develop as a result of other activities such as row crop fanning and livestock operations. However, most dove fields are the result of two factors: (1) someone plans ahead to produce a crop of seeds that will appeal to doves during the fall and winter and (2) the crop is manipulated to attract the birds at the particular time hunting will take place. The challenge is

to choose good crops and plant them at the proper time in spring and early summer to produce seeds that mature at just the right time in fall. The mature crops can then be manipulated to draw doves to the field for hunting. Such fields are totally legal under current state and federal law.

Milletts such as browntop, proso and dove proso are favorites for doves and are relatively easy and inexpensive to produce. Corn and grain sorghum require more time to mature but have been used for dove hunting for generations. Sunflowers are attractive for doves but do well only if grown in areas where the young plants won't be damaged by deer. The planting of these crops should be planned ahead to allow them to reach maturity just prior to dove season (see table). Specific recommendations for planting and fertilizing crops vary for different regions of the state. County Extension System offices are able to provide appropriate information for the areas they serve.

After a summer crop is grown it can

be manipulated in the field to ensure the seeds are available to doves. The crop can be mowed, burned, grazed, etc. in whole or in segments if necessary to extend its effectiveness for attracting doves. A crop grown for doves must remain on the field. Seed from an outside source cannot be added to the seed grown on the field. It is not legal to remove grain from the field and then redistribute it on the field. It is also not legal to store grain on the field where it is grown and then redistribute it on the field or move the grain from one location on the field to another location and redistribute it. Normally harvested fields of grain may be hunted over.

If your goal is to hunt doves in the fall, you must start early. Make plans for the crops you will grow. Plant at the proper times in spring and early summer. Manipulate the crop (mow, burn, hay, disc or graze) prior to the dove hunting season to attract more birds. Buy plenty of shotgun shells, find a good recipe for cooking doves, invite your friends and enjoy it all. 

## Dove Crop Recommendations

Crop	How to Plant	When to Plant	Seed Rate
Corn	Rows	Recommended dates by Extension System for variety	As recommended for soil type
Dove Proso Millet	Broadcast	July-Early August	20 lbs. per acre
Browntop Millet	Broadcast	At 2-week intervals in July	20 lbs. per acre
Grain Sorghum	Broadcast or Rows	June-July	20-25 lbs. per acre
Sunflower	Rows	April 1-July 15	10 lbs. per acre